

THE VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF HOUSING COUNSELORS, INC. (VAHC) CODE OF ETHICS AND CONDUCT

All members of the Virginia Association of Housing Counselors, Inc. (VAHC) vow to comply to a high standard of professionalism at all times and as set forth, but not limited to the following code of ethics and conduct.

- I. **Discrimination** - VAHC members will not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, handicap, familiar status, or any other status protected by law.

- II. **Common Courtesy** - VAHC members will extend common courtesies to other housing professionals and clients, such as:
 - a. Simple pleasantries, i.e. thank you, please, and excuse me,
 - b. Taking or making telephone calls during meeting, and
 - c. Using professional telephone, letter-writing, and e-mail etiquettes

- III. **Integrity** - VAHC members will never demonstrate a lack of integrity such as:
 - a. Disobeying the rules,
 - b. Lying (including by omission),
 - c. Claiming credit for work they did not do,
 - d. Falsifying documents,
 - e. Using private or confidential information for personal and/or fraudulent purposes, and
 - f. Disseminating private or confidential information for personal and/or fraudulent purposes

- IV. **Decision-Making** - VAHC members will use logical decision making techniques and tools; resources and information to assist their clients in making decisions. The decisions, guidance, and options provided must be in the best interest of the client.

- V. **Sensitivity** - VAHC members will display sensitivity for each client's culture and economic background with awareness, understanding, and knowledge.

- VI. **Language** - VAHC members will use truthful and respectful language in all communications, to and about clients, whether written or verbal. At no time will a member use profanity or derogatory language; language that is belittling, distasteful, or judgmental.

- VII. **Competency** - VAHC members must provide potential and existing clients knowledgeable and accurate information at all times; providing services only within the boundaries of their education, training, certification, or other relevant professional experiences.
- VIII. **Referrals** - VAHC members will seek the advice of an experienced housing professional when a consultation is in the best interest of the client.; disclosing the least amount of information necessary; with prior consent from the client.
- IX. **Difficult Clients** - VAHC members must maintain emotional control while still being impartial when dealing with irate, pessimistic, and argumentative clients.
- X. **Payment for Service** - VAHC members must adhere to “payment for service” principles to ensure equitable, moral, and lawful costs. To include but not limited to:
- a. Treating all clients equal even when no fees are charged,
 - b. Ensuring that all payments for service are fair and reasonable,
 - c. Informing clients upfront of all applicable fees,
 - d. Charging for services not rendered,
 - e. Trading the services or information provided for non-monetary compensation such as discounts, freebies, privileges, and other advantages,
 - f. Soliciting and/or accepting gifts in excess of minimum value, and
 - g. Engaging in money fraud or deceptive activities
- XI. **Discontinuation of Service** - VAHC members must carefully handle information even after the counselors’ service has been discontinued, i.e. closing files timely and adhering to retention guidelines.
- XII. **Conflict of Interest** - VAHC members shall:
- a. Act in the best interest of the client at all times; motivated to provide the highest quality of service. The clients’ interest is first and foremost the reason for any and all counseling, services and products rendered.
 - b. The member shall not hinder the clients’ interest by engaging in activities intentionally or unintentionally for the benefit of anyone other than the client. No self-promotion or third party interest.
 - c. The member shall not solely or in connection with another participate in any improprieties or fraudulent activities which negate the client’ best interest.

- XIII. **Other Fraudulent Activity** – VAHC members will not advertise, market, or promote services, qualifications, and other credentials which are fraudulent, false, deceptive, or misleading.
- XIV. **Violations** - VAHC member make every effort to uphold, maintain, and improve the professional reputation of the Virginia Association of Housing Counselors. The member will report violations of the VAHC Code of Ethics and Conduct by other members, and any other relevant information to the Board of Directors for possible remedial action.

While this Code of Ethics and Conduct establishes obligations that may be higher than those mandated by law, in any instance where the Code and the law conflict, the obligations of the law must take precedence.